UNIQUE ACADEMY

SINCERE KNOWLEDGE SEEKERS SUCCEED

Nourishing the fitrah of each unique child

Social Media Policy

"And follow not that of which you have no knowledge. Verily! The hearing, the sight and the heart, of each of those you will be questioned."

(Surah Al- Isra, The Night Journey, Verse: 36)

Adopted: January 2025	Review date: January 2026	Social Media Policy Coordinator: School Administrator

Social Media Policy

Unique Academy recognises and embraces the numerous benefits and opportunities that social media offers. While staff are encouraged to engage, collaborate and innovate through social media, they should also be aware that there are some associated risks, especially around issues of safeguarding, bullying and personal reputation.

The purpose of this policy is to encourage good practice, to protect the school and its staff, and to promote the effective use of social media as part of the school activities.

This policy covers personal and professional use of social media and aims to encourage its safe use by Unique Academy and its staff.

The policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using Unique Academy's IT facilities and equipment, or equipment belonging to members of staff.

Personal communications via social media accounts that are likely to have a negative impact on professional standards or the school's reputation are within the scope of this policy.

This policy covers all individuals working at all levels, grades and locations, including full-time, part-time staff, fixed term, onsite or remote staff.

Roles, Responsibilities And Procedure

Staff should:
- be aware of their online reputation and recognise that their online activity can be seen by others including parents, pupils and colleagues on social media
- ensure that any use of social media is carried out in line with this policy and other relevant policies, i.e. those of the school
- be aware that any excessive use of social media in school may result in disciplinary action
- be responsible for their words and actions in an online environment. They are therefore advised to consider whether any comment, photograph or video that they are about to post on a social networking site is something that they want pupils, colleagues, other staff of the school, or even future schools, to read. If in doubt, don't post it!

SLT are responsible for:
- addressing any concerns and/or questions staff may have on the use of social media
- operating within the boundaries of this policy and ensuring that all staff understand the standards of behaviour expected of them.

Definition Of Social Media

Social media is a broad term for any kind of online platform which enables people to directly interact with each other. It allows people to share information, ideas and views. Examples of social media include blogs, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Tiktok, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, Myspace, Flickr and YouTube.

Acceptable Use

Staff should be aware that content uploaded to social media is not private. Even if you restrict it to 'friends', there is still capacity for it to be re-posted or distributed beyond the intended recipients. Therefore, staff using social media should conduct themselves with professionalism and respect.

Staff should not upload any content on to social media that:

- is confidential to the school or its staff
- amounts to bullying
- amounts to unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation
- brings the school into disrepute
- contains lewd, sexually explicit, threatening or similarly inappropriate or offensive comments, images or video clips
- undermines the reputation of the school and/or individuals
- is defamatory or knowingly false
- breaches copyright
- is in any other way unlawful.

Staff should be aware of both professional and social boundaries and should not therefore accept or invite 'friend' requests from pupils or ex-pupils under the age of 18, or from parents on their personal social media accounts such as Facebook. All communication with parents via social media should be through the school's social media accounts.

Staff should note that the use of social media accounts during lesson time is not permitted.

Safeguarding

The use of social networking sites introduces a range of potential safeguarding risks to children and young people.

Potential risks can include, but are not limited to:
- online bullying
- grooming, exploitation or stalking
- exposure to inappropriate material or hateful language
- encouraging violent behaviour, self-harm or risk taking.

In order to mitigate these risks, there are steps you can take to promote safety online:

- You should not use any information in an attempt to locate or meet a child.
- Ensure that any messages, photos or information comply with existing policies.

Further advice can be found in the appendix below.

Reporting Safeguarding Concerns

Any content or online activity which raises a safeguarding concern must be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

Any online concerns should be reported as soon as identified as urgent steps may need to be taken to support the child.

With regard to personal safeguarding, you should report any harassment or abuse you receive online while using your work accounts.

Reporting, Responding And Recording Cyberbullying Incidents

Staff should never engage with cyberbullying incidents. If you discover a website containing inaccurate, inappropriate or inflammatory written material relating to you, or images of you which have been taken and/or which are being used without your permission, you should immediately report this to the Headteacher. Staff should keep any records of the abuse such as text, emails, voicemail, website or social media. If appropriate, screen prints of messages or web pages could be taken and the time, date and address of site should be recorded.

Action By School: Inappropriate Use Of Social Media

Following a report of inappropriate use of social media, the Headteacher will conduct a prompt investigation.
If in the course of the investigation, it is found that a pupil submitted the material to the website, that pupil will be disciplined in line with the school's behaviour policy.

Where appropriate, a representative of the school will approach the website hosts to ensure the material is either amended or removed as a matter of urgency, i.e within 24 hours. If the website requires the individual who is complaining to do so personally, the school will give their full support and assistance.

Checks will be carried out to ensure that the requested amendments or removals are made. If the website(s) does not cooperate, the school administrator will contact the internet service provider (ISP) as the ISP has the ability to block access to certain sites and, in exceptional circumstances, can close down a website.

If the material is threatening and/or intimidating, SLT will, with the member of staff's consent, report the matter to the police. The member of staff will be offered full support and appropriate supervision meetings.

Breaches Of This Policy

Any member of staff suspected of committing a breach of this policy (or if complaints are received about unacceptable use of social networking that has potentially breached this policy) will be investigated in accordance with the school's bullying or disciplinary procedure. The member of staff will be expected to cooperate with the school's investigation which may involve:

- handing over relevant passwords and login details
- printing a copy or obtaining a screenshot of the alleged unacceptable content
- determining that the responsibility or source of the content was in fact the member of staff.

The seriousness of the breach will be considered including the nature of the content, how long the content remained visible on the social media site, the potential for recirculation by others and the impact on the school or the individuals concerned.

Staff should be aware that actions online can be in breach of the harassment/IT/equality policies and any online breaches of these policies may also be treated as conduct issues in accordance with the disciplinary procedure.

If the outcome of an investigation leads to disciplinary action, the consequences will be dealt with in accordance with the appropriate procedures. Serious breaches could result in the dismissal of the member of staff.

Where conduct is considered to be unlawful, the school will report the matter to the police and other external agencies.

Parents

At Unique Academy, we recognise that most parents and guardians use social media in a positive and responsible manner. However, for a minority, such sites can be inappropriately used as a means of expressing negative or offensive views about school and their staff instead of approaching the school where the vast majority of concerns are easily dealt with and resolved. Our guidance in *Appendix 2*, sets out our expectations for parental use of social media and sets out the procedures we will follow and action we may take when we consider that parents have used such facilities inappropriately.

Monitoring And Review

If the Headteacher reasonably believes that a member of staff has breached this policy, from time to time the school will monitor or record communications that are sent or received from within the school's network.
This policy will be reviewed on a yearly basis and, in accordance with the following, on an as-and-when-required basis:

- legislative changes
- good practice guidance
- case law
- significant incidents reported

Legislation

Acceptable use of social networking must comply with UK law. In applying this policy, the school will adhere to its rights, responsibilities and duties in accordance with the following:

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2018
The Human Rights Act 1998
The Equality Act 2010
The Defamation Act 2013

Conclusion

The internet is a fast-moving technology and it is impossible to cover all circumstances or emerging media – the principles set out in this policy must be followed irrespective of the medium.

When using social media, staff should be aware of the potential impact on themselves and the school, whether for work-related or personal use; whether during working hours or otherwise; or whether social media is accessed using the school's equipment or using the employees equipment.

Staff should use discretion and common sense when engaging in online communication. There are some general rules and best practices in the appendix which staff may find helpful.

Responsible Use Of Social Media – Guidance For Staff

Remember that anything you post online is not really private. Below are some common sense guidelines and recommendations that staff are advised to follow to ensure responsible and safe use of social media.

● Follow this social media policy.
● Do not add pupils as friends or contacts in your social media accounts.
● Always maintain professional boundaries. Do not engage in discussion with pupils online unless through official school accounts.
● Think about the potential risks: professional boundaries of adding parents to your private social media accounts (refer to policy).
● Consider using an alternative name on sites like Facebook to make it harder for pupils to find you. For example, some members use their partner's surname online but their own surname in school.
● Never post anything that is offensive or aggressive, even if you are very angry or upset. It can easily be taken out of context.
● Remember humour is relative – what you may see as humorous to post, others may not.
● The guiding rule is: if in doubt, don't post it.
● Make sure you regularly check and refresh your site page to ensure it is free of any inappropriate comments and/or images.
● If you are tagged in something in Facebook that you consider inappropriate, use the remove tag feature to untag yourself (for details on how to do this, refer to the Facebook help centre).
● Be cautious of accepting 'friend requests' from people you do not really know. Simply being a 'friend' of your own Facebook friend does not mean that they should automatically be given access to your information.
● Review your profile information and settings on Facebook, Twitter and other sites to ensure it is appropriate as it may be accessed by others such as colleagues, pupils, parents and potential schools.
● Check your privacy and security settings regularly, and keep your date of birth and home address to yourself. Identity theft is a growing crime and this kind of information could be used to gain access to your bank or credit card account.
● If you feel dissatisfied and wish to talk about teaching, politics and life in general, consider doing so anonymously, through a networking account or blog which cannot be attributed to you. Check that anything that you post does not identify you, your school, pupils or parents.
● Ensure that any comments and/or images could not be deemed defamatory or in breach of copyright legislation.
● Never post any information which can be used to identify a pupil.
● Do not use social media in any way to attack or abuse colleagues or air any other internal grievances.
● Do not post derogatory, defamatory, offensive, harassing or discriminatory content.
● Do not engage in any conduct (using personal insults, obscenities) which would not be acceptable in the workplace.
● Do not use social media to 'whistleblow' – raise concerns through the proper channels which would entitle you to legal protection (Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998).

Responsible Use Of Social Media – Guidance For Parents

Appropriate Use Of Social Media By Parents

Parents/Guardians should consider the following prior to posting any information on social media sites about school, its staff, its pupils, or anyone else associated with it:

•Is the social networking site the appropriate channel to raise concerns, give this feedback or express these views?

•Would private and confidential discussions with school be more appropriate? E.g. if there are serious allegations being made/concerns being raised. Social media/internet sites should not be used to name individuals and make abusive comments about those people. Please contact the school to discuss any concerns you may have.

•Are such comments likely to cause emotional harm to individuals which would not be justified, particularly if school has not yet had a chance to investigate a complaint?

•The r impact that the posting of such material may have to school; any detrimental harm that the school may suffer as a result of the posting; and the impact that such a posting may have on pupils' learning.

Inappropriate Use Of Social Networking Sites By Parents

Although social media sites may appear to be the quickest and easiest way to express frustrations or concerns, it is never appropriate to do so.

Where a parent has a concern, this must be made through the appropriate channels by speaking to the class teacher in the first instance or requesting for a meeting with the Headteacher so they can be dealt with fairly, appropriately and effectively for all concerned. (See our Complaints Policy)

The school considers the following examples to be inappropriate uses of social media sites. (This list is non-exhaustive and intended to provide examples only):

•Making allegations about staff or pupils at school or cyber-bullying;

•Making complaints about the school or staff;

•Making defamatory statements about school or staff;

•Posting negative/offensive comments about specific pupils/staff;

•Posting racist comments;

•Posting comments which threaten violence.

Parents should also ensure that their children are not using social media in an inappropriate manner. It is expected that parents/carers explain to their children what is acceptable to post online. Parents/carers are also expected to monitor their children's online activity, including in relation to their use of social media.

Procedure The School Will Follow If Inappropriate Use Continues:

In the event that any pupil or parent/guardian of a child/ren is found to be posting libellous or defamatory comments on Facebook or other social media sites, they will be reported to the appropriate 'report abuse' section of the network site. All social media sites have clear rules about the content which can be posted on the site and they provide robust mechanisms to report contact or activity which breaches this. The school will also expect that any parent/guardian removes such comments immediately and will be asked to attend a meeting with the Headteacher to discuss the breaking of the Home-School Agreement and the possible repercussions of such action.

If the parent refuses to comply with these procedures and continues to use social media sites in a manner the school considers inappropriate, the school will consider taking the following action:

•Take legal advice and/or legal action where the information posted is defamatory in any way or if the circumstances warrant this;

•Set out the school's concerns to you in writing, giving you a warning and requesting that the material in question is removed;

•Contact the Police where the school feels it appropriate – for example, if it considers a crime (such as harassment) has been committed; or in cases where the posting has a racial element, is considered to be grossly obscene or is threatening violence;

•If the inappropriate comments have been made on a school forum, the school may take action to block or restrict that individual's access to that website or forum;

•Contact the host/provider of the Social Networking site to complain about the content of the site and ask for removal of the information;

•Take other legal action against the individual.